

The Legend of Zelda – Majora’s Mask has just been released on the Nintendo 64. We’ll start by introducing the people that will be appearing in this interview. Gathered here today to talk with us are producer Shigeru Miyamoto, and two of the game’s six directors: Eiji Aonuma and Yoshiaki Koizumi. This marks the first part of the interview. Let’s take a look at what sort of team was behind the creation of Zelda!

The Participants



Name: Eiji Aonuma

Attached To: Nintendo Ltd. Research & Development Division

Worked On: Marvelous – Another Treasure Island (SNES), The Legend of Zelda – Ocarina of Time (N64)



Name: Yoshiaki Koizumi

Attached To: Nintendo Ltd. Research & Development Division

Worked On: The Legend of Zelda – Link’s Awakening (GB), Super Mario 64 & The Legend of Zelda – Ocarina of Time (N64)



Name: Shigeru Miyamoto

Attached To: Nintendo Ltd. Research & Development Division

Worked On: Many titles, including The Legend of Zelda – Ocarina of Time & Super Mario 64 (N64) Kirby’s Dreamland & Pokémon (GB)

Zelda’s Always Bringing Something New to the Table



Why don't you start by telling us about your role in creating the game?

Koizumi: Just like its predecessor, Ocarina of Time, Majora's Mask has characters that can be controlled by the player. Part of my job was to make several enhancements to those characters. I also created scheduled events, which served as subplots that progressed alongside the main storyline.

Miyamoto: We had 6 directors working on Majora's Mask, just doing game design. There were even more directors in addition to them, but it was those 6 individuals that were involved in creating the foundation of the game. Aonuma was the supervising director, Koizumi worked on the sub-events and player-related aspects, [Takano](#) was in charge of the script, [Usui](#) was involved with the dungeons, and Yamada was the head of system management. Finally, [Kawagoe](#) served as the cutscene director.

Aonuma: We called this the multifaceted director system. [Laughs]

Miyamoto: In Ocarina of Time, Aonuma mainly worked on the dungeons, and he also directed [Marvelous – Another Treasure Island](#). For Majora's Mask, however, he took on the role of supervising director, and was put in charge of the entire overworld, to boot.

Aonuma: To put it simply, I was responsible for the fairy-tale sections, and Koizumi was responsible for creating realistic depictions of the lives of the townspeople. I tried to emulate the fantasy atmosphere we had in Ocarina of Time...

Koizumi: And I created realistic lives for the characters.

Aonuma: You could say that Koizumi slapped his worldview on the whole thing. [Laughs]

Koizumi: I put in everything I've seen in my 30-something years on this earth.

Miyamoto: It's a very serious game. [Laughs]

Koizumi: Aonuma was in charge of the outdoors, and when he saw how serious my town was, he made his areas of the game more light-hearted.



Is that something you decided on after discussing it together?

Aonuma: No, we don't really talk about things like that. In short, I basically figured "Well, if Koizumi's thinking he'll do that, then I should be okay to do this." Because we had the same team on both Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask, we already knew how things would turn out, even if they were never discussed. We had an idea of what to expect, and just waited for it to unfold. We had multiple directors, so people would create things individually, and then we'd put them all together at the end. That was our creative style.

Miyamoto: I never include worrywarts. My development teams are made up of people who know how to relax.

Aonuma: That's right.

Miyamoto: Everyone gets together to discuss the overall specs. We start by tossing ideas back and forth for 2 to 3 months. Once our vision is more or less solidified, everyone goes off and starts working on each individual section.

Aonuma: As long as we all have a common goal in mind, everyone is able to work towards it on an individual basis. Of course, the only reason that we were able to take that approach was thanks to Ocarina of Time.



So, the staff mostly carried over from the last game?

Koizumi: That's right. And we had some newcomers who participated as well.

Miyamoto: Actually, we started out by cutting the Ocarina of Time development team in half and adding some new people. Once we realized that our initial setup just wasn't going to work, I was forced to recall the original team members. In the end, around 70% of the team was made up of people who had worked on Ocarina of Time. Because I was producing the entire game, I had the final say in everything. To put it simply, it was up to me to say "We're not done here yet." I just had to wait until everything was finished. Once the opening meetings were done with, I didn't really contribute anything. That being said, during the latter half of development, I'd occasionally complain about this and that. Just like a tester. "Just think of me as a member of the [Mario Club](#)," I'd say. [Laughs]

Koizumi: "Miyamoto hasn't said a thing," we'd whisper amongst ourselves. "He will eventually, right?"

Miyamoto: I took it easy. Working on Majora's Mask was fun!

That's because you trusted the staff and they trusted you, right?

Miyamoto: Yeah. It was like Aonuma had a golden halo around him. [Laughs] I'd see it and be like "I'm leaving early!"

How long did development take?

Aonuma: I looked it up. We started programming the game on February 1st last year.

Miyamoto: We'd been discussing different ideas about a month prior to that. So, it took around a year, all in all.



Were Koizumi and Aonuma also fully involved in the development process during that year?

Koizumi: Actually, at the time I started working on Majora's Mask, I had already been busy designing another game. I'm incredibly ambitious, you see. But then, Miyamoto...

Miyamoto: Recalled you.

Koizumi: I heard the whispers... "Zelda... Zelda... Zelda...!" And my game was canned!

Miyamoto: [Laughs]

Koizumi: I was in shock. [Laughs]

Miyamoto: Generally, I'd wait till July or August to start recalling people, once I saw that there was no other way. But, in this case, I realized how insurmountable our task was just a few months after starting, and so I asked him to come back.

Aonuma: I tried to work on things all by myself, but I had no choice. I ended up asking Koizumi to come back. I couldn't have done it alone.

Miyamoto: The designs just got bigger and bigger. At first, we talked about switching up the dungeons, but we couldn't have just left things at that. [Laughs] I pulled Kawagoe, the cutscene director, away from what he was working on with Koizumi.



So, you didn't start out with 6 directors?

Miyamoto: That's correct. However, we didn't begin serious work on the game until we'd called them back to work on our project, so you could say we had them from the start. There was just a period beforehand where we experimented with things via trial and error.

Koizumi: I think it was the end of May by the time I finally closed my design doc...

Miyamoto: It's a shame when a game takes 3 years to make. So, I figured, why not do it in 1? I wanted to be able to say "We can do it too!" I thought that if we just used the engine for Ocarina of Time and layered a new scenario on top of that, we'd be able to create a reasonably large game in 12 months.

When it comes to Zelda, we're always trying to advance the series by making each installment a step up from the one before. That means a 2 year development period is the norm. That being said, we usually start out with a small number of staff who spend a year experimenting with new ideas, so it comes to about 3 years in total. Plus, if we're developing for new hardware, we spend another year studying its capabilities.

However, it really only takes a year to make the game itself. For Majora's Mask, we had 30 to 50 staff members working on the game right from the get-go. With amount of resources required for a Zelda game, we had everyone working overtime. Striving for a unique experience with every game makes for hard work. And we did manage to do that with Majora's Mask. So, all in all, I can say that it made for one strenuous year.



I felt that the atmosphere of Majora's Mask was incredibly fresh.

Miyamoto: It's very Zelda-esque. And by Zelda-esque, I mean that Zelda games are always released together with new hardware, and use it to innovate.

Even the fact that you managed to develop a game in such a short period of time on the N64 is rare in itself. I have a feeling that everyone was anticipating how different the game would be from Ocarina of Time. I definitely think you achieved something unique.

Koizumi: When my other game design got scrapped and I was stuck back with the development team, [Laughs] I asked Miyamoto what I was supposed to do. I still remember the answer he gave me. "Do whatever you can!"

Miyamoto: [Laughs]

Koizumi: That's what he told us! I remember thinking to myself "That's not helpful at all!" [Laughs] I'd originally been designing a board game, based around the theme of cops and robbers. I wanted to make it so that you technically had to catch the criminal within a week, but, in reality, you could finish the game in an hour. I figured I'd just throw what I already had into Majora's Mask.

Miyamoto: And it worked really well. Instead of doing a game comprised of 8 volumes or multiple chapters, I wanted to make a compact entry in the Zelda series that could be replayed over and over, revealing greater depth with each play-through.

It's useless to make something that the audience just skims over in one viewing, like a movie. The full flavor of a creation gradually emerges with each viewing, as all the subtleties reveal themselves. That's what we were aiming for. It's something I've always strived towards.

Koizumi: We knew Miyamoto had always been saying how he wanted to make a short Zelda.



Miyamoto: I wanted it to be dense, something with maybe 4 dungeons, a game where you could fight the same bosses twice. I wanted to pay attention to every detail.

Koizumi: The three years we spent on Ocarina of Time taught us that it was difficult to create a ton of content. So, this time around, we wanted players to be able to play through what we'd created multiple times.

Miyamoto: It wasn't all difficult, though. If you think of the development process in terms of makeup, we'd already laid down the foundation. All we had to do was layer everything else on top. We pulled aspects like the name entry screen and various menu screens from Ocarina of Time and reused what we could.

Aonuma: It wasn't that we figured we didn't have to bother changing them, but rather that we felt it was better to have them, so we left them in.

Miyamoto: And, more importantly, we wanted to advance the series and do something new. We had a lot of ambition.